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ABSTRACT

The use of adjunct faculty members is largely dictated and controlled by institutional needs and policies that exist outside academic departments. Within those institutional frameworks, however, there exist substantial opportunities for departments to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty members. Through the judicious use of resources, department chairpersons can play an important role in determining how the adjunct faculty members view, and are viewed by, the institution. This paper discusses the specific challenges and opportunities faced at Otterbein College, where the author is chair of the Department of Communication. It presents practical hiring, orientation, assessment, and allocation strategies developed for use in the Department of Communication that chairpersons can use to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty members. (Contains 5 notes and 14 references.) (RS)

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by John Weispfenning

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Department Strategies for Avoiding the Abuse of Part-Time Instructors

John Weispfenning, Ph.D.[1]

Abstract

The use of adjunct faculty members is largely dictated and controlled by institutional needs and policies that exist outside academic departments. Within those institutional frameworks, however, there exist substantial opportunities for departments to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty members. Through the judicious use of resources, department chairpersons can play an important role in determining how the adjunct faculty members view, and are viewed by, the institution. This paper presents practical hiring, orientation, assessment, and allocation strategies that chairpersons can use to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty members.

The use of part-time faculty members[2] by colleges and universities is largely dictated and controlled by institutional needs and policies that exist outside academic departments. Part-time faculty represent a "fact of life for many universities" (Blanchard & Christ, 1993, p. 118). The national trend is clear: in the 1970s, four-year institutions increased the number of full-time faculty by 9 percent, while part-time faculty increased 38 percent (Tucker, 1984). At four-year schools from 1995-1997, twice as many new part-time faculty were hired as were full-time faculty (*Employment*, 2000). Administrators cite flexibility in staffing as a response to increasing enrollments as a primary reason for the increased use of part-time faculty (Leatherman, 2000). It is also clear, however, that the financial savings an institution can reap

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from employing part-time instructors are lucrative, particularly during times of budgetary or other uncertainties (Tucker, 1984).

Yet within the institutional frameworks that determine the need for, and general policies governing, part-time faculty, there exist substantial opportunities for individual departments and department chairs to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty members. Through the judicious use of resources, department chairpersons can play an important role in improving the working conditions of adjunct faculty members and in determining how those adjunct faculty members view, and are viewed by, the institution.

Issues Surrounding Adjunct Faculty

There are multiple dimensions to the questions surrounding the use of part-time faculty in higher education. Some part-time faculty members are employed full-time and seek part-time teaching opportunities as a form of expression not available to them in their other careers. Other part-time faculty members have studied and prepared for full-time teaching positions, but have been unable to secure full-time positions for either personal or professional reasons.[3] Depending on the part-time faculty member's individual perspective, teaching part-time may be viewed as an opportunity to interact with intellectually-active, inquisitive people. It may be viewed as a temporary stop on the way to a full-time, tenure-track position. It may be viewed as a way to remain engaged in teaching even when there is little possibility of future full-time faculty work. There may also be a sense of victimhood attached to part-time status. Twigg (1989) points out that the use of part-time faculty is often viewed as the exploitation of those who want to teach.

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[3] I use the term "part-time" faculty member interchangeably with "adjunct" to denote those faculty members who hold less than full-time appointments with educational institutions. In addition, these appointments are typically term-to-term with the majority compensated on a per-course basis.

Nationally, part-time faculty made up just less than one-third of the 682,650 faculty employed at 4-year institutions in 1997-98 (*Employment*, 2000). While the percentage of women employed as part-time faculty at community colleges is above 50 percent (German, 1996), at four-year institutions, men make up the majority of both full-time and part-time faculty. In 1997, 66.7% of full-time faculty and 55% of part-time faculty were men (*Employment*, 2000).

Institutions are aware of these trends and their implications, and some have responded by adopting policies designed to minimize the potential negative impact of part-time employment on faculty and students. The state of California has recently passed a law that will provide health insurance to part-time instructors at community colleges if they work 40 percent of a full-time load or more. The law is expected to provide half of the state's part-time faculty with insurance (Lords, 1999). The law also makes it possible to pay part-time faculty for holding office hours, and mandates a study of pay disparities between full- and part-time faculty members.

To increase student access to faculty, the University of Georgia created 95 new full-time faculty positions and filled 62 of the slots with people who used to teach part-time at the school (Wilson, 1999). In the semester before the conversion occurred, the College of Arts and Sciences employed 189 part-timers. After the shift, 79 part-timers were employed. The new positions paid $24,000 for teaching eight classes per year and have health and retirement benefits. The new full-time faculty were given offices with computers, but they have to reapply for their positions each year. Under the old system, part-time faculty could teach a

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[3] Examples of personal reasons for not securing a full-time teaching position might include a lack of openings within a specific geographic area or concerns about family or personal relationships. An example of a professional reason might include a lack of full-time openings within a job candidate's academic specialty.

maximum of eight classes per year for $2,000 per class (Wilson, 1999). However, for some of the previously part-time faculty, the conversion meant the end of their employment:

> Because the university ended up with fewer full-timers than it had part-timers, it got to pick the cream of the crop. Most departments received two to three times more applications for the visiting slots than they had openings. That meant they could say goodbye to part-timers who hadn't exactly been doing the best job (Wilson, 1999, p. A18).

Despite the University of Georgia's conversion of part-time positions to full-time positions, it is obvious that a reliance by many institutions on part-time faculty to fill curricular and personnel needs will not disappear in the near future. German (1996) predicted part-time faculty will dominate higher education in the future. This prediction is supported by several arguments and practices. Adjunct faculty can be useful in "enhancing programmatic richness" (Sayer, 1999, p. 102). Similarly, in professionally-oriented fields such as media or public relations, practitioners see the hiring of adjuncts as a strength of programs (Blanchard & Christ, 1993). Part-time faculty may often be used to staff new programs prior to an institution making a commitment (Tucker, 1984).

Still, the working conditions and status of part-time faculty are increasingly issues of concern within higher education. Sayer (1999) noted that the "typical adjunct is horribly overworked, horribly underpaid, and totally unappreciated" (p. 102).

A study of part-time faculty at Prince Georges Community College in Maryland speaks further to the desires of part-time faculty. Adjunct faculty, especially those who are long term, desire a greater sense of institutional belonging and a better orientation to institutional policies (Cohen, 1992). Following the survey, the college made several changes to address the concerns of the adjuncts: (a) increase pay based on length of service; (b) list senior

part-time faculty in the college catalog; (c) uniformly use the title "adjunct," not "part-time"; (d) hold faculty orientation sessions each term; (e) offer more faculty development workshops; (f) create a handbook for adjunct faculty; and (g) honor an outstanding adjunct each year (Cohen, 1992).

Tucker (1984) identified both institutional problems and advantages that are associated with the use of part-time faculty. Potential problems include:

- Part-time faculty may feel exploited in their wages
- There may be a lack of continuity in academic programs and curriculum
- Part-time faculty are often not required to hold office hours
- There is a perception that part-time faculty may not fully prepare for their courses
- There is generally not an expectation that part-time faculty will participate in committee work, curricular development, and governance
- As the number of part-time faculty on a campus increases, full-time faculty can sometimes fear that governance may be taken over
- Divisions may develop between full-time and part-time faculty

Tucker reported that protential advantages of part-time faculty may include:

- Lower cost to the institution
- Fewer long-term commitments
- Part-time faculty have a generally positive attitude
- Part-time faculty are usually up-to-date in their fields
- Part-time faculty can constitute a candidate pool when a full-time opening occurs
- Part-time faculty may have a better understanding of part-time students
- Part-time faculty are rarely unionized
- Part-time faculty can provide a link with the larger community

What Departments Can Do

Several authors have considered what departments can do to be more responsible in their employment of part-time faculty. Tucker (1984) noted the need to develop clear, written policies about part-time faculty members' duties and responsibilities. Such a document can clarify institutional expectations and can list terms of employment, such as length of appointment, salary, and duties. This will help to avoid any "false expectations concerning the probability of future employment, either part- or full-time" (p. 367).

Sayer (1999) encouraged department administrators to treat all faculty the same regardless of full- or part-time status. This may often mean that adjunct faculty should receive better office space and more department support than they generally have in the past:

> If we want our adjuncts to provide instructional quality equal to that of our full-time faculty, then we must provide the supporting environment that will enable such quality to be offered. Students often need to speak or conference with their faculty, and it is hard to do so when the adjunct's office is the trunk of a car (Sayer, 1999, p. 103).

Beyond clearly spelling out contractual obligations and improving basic office access, German (1996) asked departments to focus on professional development opportunities for part-time faculty:

> Increasing the part-timer's sense of control may have direct impact on self-esteem, commitment, and classroom effectiveness. Increased responsibility and limited control are key factors that increase job stress, depress productivity, and restrict personal fulfillment (p. 238).

In the following sections of this paper, I will discuss the specific challenges and opportunities faced at the college where I chair a department. I will then develop specific

strategies that can be used in hiring, orientation, assessment, and allocation of resources that chairpersons can use to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty members. Although these issues cross institutional boundaries, I offer my institution as a case study in the following sections. I do not do this from any sense that my institution and department have solved the problems surrounding the use of part-time faculty, because we have not. The use of a single department does allow a grounded method for locating potential problems and solutions within a specific context and situation.

About Otterbein College

Otterbein College is a regional liberal arts college with a total enrollment of 2,900 students. Of those, 1,850 are traditional undergraduate students, with the balance in graduate and continuing education programs. Enrollments have been on a fairly steady slow-growth pattern, although freshman class sizes have increased notably in the past two years: This fall, we enrolled a first-year class of 542, an increase of 37 from one year ago.

Otterbein is located in Westerville, Ohio, a suburb on the northeast side of Columbus, the state capital. The metropolitan population is 1.4 million and growing. Columbus is also home to The Ohio State University, one of the largest campuses in the nation, with 50,000 students.

Otterbein is a fiscally conservative institution. The president boasts that the college doesn't break ground for new buildings until the money is in the bank. While this allows the college to routinely balance its budget, it does make it more difficult to quickly meet the need for new facilities. A new classroom building was completed in 1994 along with new student housing. Since then, the oldest classroom building on campus has been completely renovated. Still, the pressure created by growing enrollments is taxing classroom and office capacity.

Two departments, including Communication, and several administrative offices are located in college-owned houses on the edges of the campus.

The Department of Communication offers majors in five areas (Broadcasting, Journalism, Organizational Communication, Public Relations, and Speech Communication) that serve approximately 300 student majors. Growth in the department has mirrored the slow and steady growth pattern established by the College. The Department employs eleven full-time faculty (up from three in 1987), one administrative assistant, and two television support staff members. This year we will hire 14 part-time faculty to teach a total of 39 course sections, which represents 41 percent of our total course offerings. Full-time faculty in the department manage or advise a student radio station, a community cable television channel, a weekly student newspaper, and the campus yearbook. Full-time faculty also advise organizations for students majoring in public relations and organizational communication, as well as two honoraries: Pi Kappa Delta and Lambda Pi Eta.

The department moved to its current offices one year ago to consolidate faculty offices and gain space for new full-time faculty members. Unfortunately, we have already outgrown the house's capacity. The department is on the list of departments expected to benefit from the next round of campus construction, but that is, optimistically, five to eight years away. Department offices, classes, and activities are now spread across six buildings. Prior to the move, we were in five buildings.

Hiring and Orientation

Because we are located so near to a metropolitan area that features a highly educated population, finding qualified part-time instructors is not difficult. Our biggest need from part-time faculty is for lower division general communication courses (fundamentals of public speaking, business and professional communication) and journalism courses (media writing,

on-line sources and design, news writing, desktop publishing). We use few adjuncts for courses in broadcasting and public relations, yet approximately half of the queries I get about part-time teaching are from professionals in these fields who wish to teach upper division courses. Our current pool of adjuncts is quite stable, and we are able to use only one or two new part-time faculty each year.

Typically, I receive either telephone calls or letters from individuals who wish to teach for us. If the initial query is over the phone, I invite the person to send a resume and supporting materials and will ask the person to come in for a brief meeting. If the applicant has sent a letter, I send a letter in response, and invite the person to call me to set up a brief meeting. In both my conversations and correspondence with potential part-time faculty, I am as open as possible about the likelihood of having courses in the individual's specialty. If there is no chance of being able to match our course needs with the person's background, I let them know that so that no false hope is created.

Most of the potential part-time faculty I deal with have realistic expectations about college teaching. Almost all have taught as graduate teaching assistants, full-time faculty, or part-time faculty at other institutions. Orientation for our part-time faculty means learning about three primary areas: (1) the college's expectations for classroom teaching; (2) college and departmental procedures; and (3) the specific requirements of teaching a particular course. As the department chairperson, I work with most new faculty on expectations and procedure in a series of moderately structured one-on-one meetings.[4] For more experienced teachers, this may be done in as few as two meetings supported by telephone calls or e-mails. For less experienced teachers, this orientation may take as many as five meetings with additional

[4] The exception is for those adjuncts hired to teach in our Journalism major. Our primary journalism instructor handles many of the orientation needs of new adjuncts while discussing content and methods of specific courses.

telephone calls or e-mails. In terms of orientation to a particular course, I will work with the adjunct to choose textbooks and materials and by supplying syllabi and other course assignments and exercises. If the course is outside my personal expertise, I will ask a full-time faculty member to provide the new adjunct with additional help in developing course materials.

Mentoring and Assessment

Once the term begins, mentoring of part-time faculty is done by the chairperson, supported by the disciplinary expertise of other faculty. As a department, we do not have a set schedule of meetings with part-time faculty. Rather, mentoring is done on an as-needed, one-on-one basis. Some part-time faculty desire or need more mentoring as teachers than do others. Particularly, I have found those faculty who may be less experienced classroom teachers to have the most questions about pedagogy and classroom management. With few exceptions, however, most of the questions I receive are situationally specific to a class or student and are difficult to anticipate or predict, which makes them well-suited to individual conversations.

In conjunction with mentoring, as chairperson, I observe each new adjunct faculty member at least once in the first few weeks of his/her teaching at Otterbein. Following the observation of teaching, I prepare a written report that describes what I have seen in the classroom, reserving value judgments for the concluding paragraph.[5] The observation report is then given to the faculty member. This routinely serves two reassurance functions: (1) I can reassure myself that the new part-time faculty member is meeting college and student expectations for teaching ability; and (2) I can reassure the new part-time faculty member that he or she is meeting college and student expectations. While it is my goal to observe, at least

once annually, the classroom teaching of every part-time faculty member, I must confess that I failed to meet that goal last year.

In the event that there may be a problem with a part-time faculty member's performance, this observation report provides the starting point for conversations about what the new adjunct needs to do to improve. I have also used the observation process to initiate conversations about the student evaluation of teaching form that we use at Otterbein. All part-time faculty are expected to use student course evaluations in each section they teach. These evaluations are provided to the adjunct and, along with the chairperson's observation report, are kept in the part-time faculty member's departmental personnel file.

Beyond the mentoring that is done during the initial quarters of teaching, our department has had more difficulty involving part-time faculty in the life of the department. In part, this may be because not all part-time faculty want to be included in departmental activities: many have full-time careers outside our institution. Teaching is important to them, but their connection to our department is secondary in their lives. Their teaching schedules run the gamut from early weekday morning classes to Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. They hold classes on-campus and at corporate sites around Columbus, and even at one site in Newark, Ohio, which is 35 miles from our campus. Add in full family responsibilities, and the desire and ability of part-time faculty to participate in non- teaching departmental activities is severely restricted. At the same time, our department has a few faculty who would like to participate more actively in the life of the department, and they have the credentials and experience to contribute to our curriculum and students. The issue here, as I see it, is giving those part-time faculty who want to participate in the department the level of participation they desire.

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[5] This is the same procedure followed in the college-required annual observations of full-time faculty.

There are three areas where departments may have the autonomy and resources to effect change in the participation levels for those part-time faculty who desire more inclusion. The first area concerns academic governance and issues of control. Can part-time faculty serve on departmental committees? Can they attend departmental meetings? Do they have input into textbook selection for courses with multiple sections and instructors? Are they consulted during the preparation of teaching schedules and offerings? The second area concerns professional advancement. Can part-time faculty take advantage of on-campus professional workshops, either disciplinary or pedagogically-based? Are they encouraged to become members in state or regional associations? If they are active in these associations, are there departmental monies available to support their activities? Is the department informing long-term faculty of whether they are eligible for tuition remissions to support continuing education? The third area is socially-based, rather than professionally-based, yet it is no less important. Are part-time faculty invited to departmental celebrations and receptions? Are they invited to parties held by faculty?

Even if part-time faculty choose not to take advantage of these professional and social opportunities, there is great value in the offering. And for those faculty who do choose to participate, you will have increased opportunities to help them understand the importance of the role they fill at your institution.

Allocation of Resources

Although it should go without saying, all part-time faculty should have access to adequate office space, telephones (with voice mail), and computers with Web-access and e-mail. Part-time faculty need private space in which they can meet with students and conduct their work. Otterbein is in a fortunate position of growing enrollments, but it means we

have outgrown our physical office space. Part-time faculty are automatically assigned e-mail accounts, but must use public computer labs to access their accounts.

One year ago, I arranged for an adjunct office in a nearby building, but our Service Department delayed connection of a telephone, there was no college-support for a networked computer, and the copier and secretarial support were in the Communication House. Approximately six weeks after we were given the office, no adjuncts had yet used the space, which was unsurprising, and the department adjacent to the office requested the space. As we were unlikely to see our part-timers use the space with any regularity, I let them have it.

For the remainder of this academic year, we have achieved a temporary solution. One of our full-time faculty members has been given a release from teaching. Her office and computer will be available to part-time faculty. After that, there are no obvious options for developing office space for our part-time faculty that would be anywhere near our department's offices.

While the lack of suitable office space is a severe problem for us, it is not as large a crisis as it could be. Most of our part-time faculty are employed outside the institution or maintain home offices, and they make themselves widely available to students outside of classes. At the same time, there must be not only an acknowledgement of, but action to ensure, the basic responsibility of the institution to provide at least the minimal resources a part-time faculty member needs to successfully teach, both inside and outside of the classroom. And, as a department, we must be aware of the perception this can create in our students, particularly at a teaching campus, like Otterbein, where there is a strong emphasis on building and maintaining student-faculty connections. The lack of permanent office space for our part-time faculty therefore remains an issue for our department.

Engaging Faculty in Developing Solutions

There may be, for some departments, an advantage to solving problems surrounding the employment of part-time faculty through collaborative efforts. If the majority of faculty believe that a problem exists and there is a need for a solution, the chairperson might consider a group process to explore potential solutions. Group process can be used to identify the difference between the current allocation of resources and the desired allocation of resources. The group process is also useful at creating a consensus among faculty and for developing a sense of ownership of any solutions developed by the group. As such, this process would be most useful when the faculty may, as a group, control resources greater than those controlled by the department chairperson. For example, in many departments, once faculty offices are assigned, they are under the control of the faculty member. However, if the faculty members themselves developed the solution of office sharing to free up a space for use by part-time faculty members, their decision would legitimize the reallocation of departmental resources.

Discussion

It becomes clear from a review of the literature and the practices of academic units that there are things departments can do to improve the status and working conditions of part-time faculty even when the larger college or university may be slow to recognize the need for change and to implement the resulting reforms.

In hiring and orientation, departments can establish lines of open communication that can carry into the part-time faculty member's employment. Departments should be upfront with applicants about (1) the likely availability of appropriate course sections; (2) the qualifications needed to teach at the institution; and (3) college and department expectations of teaching quality. It is important that departments respond to all queries from applicants, no matter how unlikely it appears that an applicant would be selected. A carefully-phrased letter,

telephone call, or e-mail takes minimal effort and serves as an indicator of the professionalism of the department. In preparing new part-time faculty for teaching, they should be informed of (1) policies at the departmental and college level and (2) past practices in the course(s) they are assigned to teach. Copies of syllabi, exercises, and examinations should be routinely supplied, and part-time faculty should be encouraged to ask questions of full-time faculty who have expertise in teaching specific courses.

For some small departments, it may be possible to hold meetings with the entire adjunct faculty to discuss questions about teaching or to present information that they need as members of the institution. However, in most departments with which I have been affiliated, scheduling a group meeting with adjuncts has been all but impossible. As such, individual meetings and communications can be used to answer questions and mentor adjuncts. Part-time faculty deserve to know how they're doing, and the tools and procedures used to assess full-time faculty and courses can and should be used for part-time faculty. This may include student evaluations of course and instructor, chairpersons' observations, and peer classroom observations. These materials should provide the basis for continuing conversations about teaching between the chairperson and the individual adjunct.

Chairpersons must also be aware of the autonomy and resources they control that can be used to increase the participation of some adjuncts in the life of their departments. In departmental governance, professional advancement, and social activities, there are almost always methods for part-time faculty to use to make meaningful contributions to our institutions. For example, part-time faculty might be able to serve on departmental committees or be consulted on issues of working conditions, such as course offerings or scheduling. They can be encouraged to participate in state or regional disciplinary associations, and their participation can be supported in both monetary and non-monetary

ways. Part-time faculty should be invited to departmental social functions, both official and unofficial.

In the area of resource allocation, departments must work to ensure part-time faculty access to office space and computers. These are tools necessary to perform the task we are asking of these individuals. While the ability to create new office space or purchase (and network) computers may be beyond a department's obvious resources, departments almost always have options. Departments, while at the mercy of the larger, controlling academic units, can use group problem solving processes to begin to think more creatively about how we allocate our resources. In the final analysis, departments must no longer accept the status quo, but must do what they can to improve the working conditions of part-time faculty.

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